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ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

MEDICAL OFFICER

OF HEALTH

FOR THE

Urban District of Northam

IN DEVON

For the year 1925.

J. EDMUND FRANCIS, M.O.H.

BIDEFORD:

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ANNUAL REPORT, 1925

1—Natural and Social Conditions of the Area

AREA (in acres) 3042 ; but including Northam Ridge, 4549.

POPULATION (Census 1921, and estimated 1925) 6060. Distributed in the different Wards in the following proportion :

Appledore Ward	...	...	2806
Northam Ward	...	...	1397
Westward Ho ! Ward	...	...	952
Orchard Hill Ward	...	...	835
Northam Ridge	...	...	70

Number of inhabited houses, 1396.

Number of families or separate occupiers, 1401.

Rateable Value, £24,662 10s. Assessable value for District Rate £20,250. Sum represented by a penny rate, £83.

Social and Physical Conditions.

The District is divided into 4 Wards for purpose of Election to the Urban District Council, viz : Northam, Westward Ho ! Orchard Hill, and Appledore Wards. The first three are mainly residential, Westward Ho ! being a favourite sea resort in the South West of England. Appledore Ward is thickly populated, and has ship-building and Repairing Yards which employ a large number of hands. The Links of the Royal North Devon Golf Club are situated on Northam Burrows, attracting a large number of visitors during the year. There is an outlying portion of Northam Parish situated on the South side of Bideford known as Northam Ridge, which is about 1500 acres in extent and has a population of 70 (about).

2—Vital Statistics for 1925.

Births and Birth Rate.

The total of Births in the District was 102, of these 45 were males and 57 females ; two females were illegitimate.

The birth rate per 1000 of the population was 16.8, that for England and Wales being 18.3.

Deaths and Death Rate.

The total deaths were 72 (31 males and 41 females) but 50 per cent. of these were 70 years or over. The death rate per 1000 was 11.8, that for England and Wales being 12.2.

There were no deaths from childbirth, measles or from Diarrhoea in children under 2 years of age, but one child died as the result of whooping cough.

Infantile Deaths and Death Rate.

There were 3 deaths of children under one year of age, none of these were illegitimate. The Infantile Death Rate (i.e. the number of deaths of children under one year per 1000 births registered) was 29.4, that for England and Wales being 75.

3—Causes of Sickness and Invalidity specially noteworthy during the last 5 years.

In 1921 an epidemic of measles of a mild type occurred in Appledore in the Autumn. The cases were chiefly confined to one Infant School which was closed for 3 weeks at the end of October. In 1923, another epidemic of measles occurred in the Autumn. Appledore was first affected, in consequence of which two schools were closed in October. The epidemic then spread to Northam causing the Infant School to be closed in November. In the autumn of 1925, Diphtheria broke out in Appledore, cases occurring intermittently to the end of the year.

4—General provision of Health Services in the Area.

There are no Hospitals in the District provided or subsidized by the Local Authority, or by the County Council ; and no Institutional provision for unmarried mothers, illegitimate infants and homeless children in the area.

The District is, however, provided for by the Bideford and District Hospital, which is supported partly by voluntary contributions and partly by patients fees, and is available for medical and surgical cases. There is an ambulance in connection with the Hospital for non-infectious cases. The new Hospital buildings were completed during the Autumn of 1925 and contain about 50 beds. The Hospital is thoroughly up-to-date in every respect, and is badly in need of funds to meet the increased cost for its upkeep.

Bideford and Northam Joint Isolation Hospital.

This Hospital, situated East-the-water, Bideford, now provides facilities for the admission of Infectious cases from the Northam District. A Joint Hospital Committee is formed from the members of the Bideford and Northam Councils. At present the accommodation is limited, only one class of infectious disease being admitted at the same time.

Public Health Officers of the Local Authority.

There are two Public Health Officers of the Council—the Medical Officer of Health and the Sanitary Inspector—both being part-time officers. Contributions are made under the Public Health Acts to the salaries of each.

Nursing Arrangements in the Area.

The Nursing arrangements for the District are provided for by two voluntary Nursing Associations, one for Northam, Westward Ho! and Orchard Hill, and the other for Appledore. There is in addition one qualified Midwife practising in Northam.

5—Sanitary Circumstances of the Area

Northam Water Supply.

The Water Supply is derived from a reservoir draining a large tract of moorland at Melbury, situated in Parkham Parish, about 9 miles from the Service Reservoir on Buckleigh Hill above Northam. During the last few years difficulty has been experienced in obtaining a sufficient supply of water to meet the increased needs of the district. Duplication of the main was decided upon and part of this was completed in 1924, the remaining portion has yet to be done. Following this duplication, excavation of the Melbury Reservoir was begun at the end of the Summer in 1925—it is hoped to increase the capacity of the Reservoir from about 30 million to 38 million gallons by this means. Owing to flood water getting into the excavated part and the consequent fouling of the filter beds, great difficulty was experienced during the past winter in obtaining an adequate supply of water for the district, both as regards quantity and quality. The filter beds have now been repaired and samples of water have recently been taken for analysis, one from the filtered water tank at Melbury and the other from the Service Reservoir at Buckleigh. The Reports sent by a London firm of analysts state that neither sample contains injurious elements and that they are both perfectly satisfactory for drinking purposes.

Rainfall for 1925.

The Total Rainfall was 48.94 inches, compared with 56.17 inches in 1924, 60.33 inches in 1923, and 38.39 inches in the dry year 1921.

The highest rainfall per month in 1925 was 7.8 inches in October, and the lowest nil in June.

Rivers and Streams Pollution.

The only river or stream affected by sewage is tidal.

Drainage and Sewerage.

The arrangements for drainage, sewerage and sewage disposal are well supervised. One new sewer has been laid during 1925 at Westward Ho ! to replace an existing drain which had been broken by the action of the tide and had become a nuisance.

Closet Accommodation.

A great number of cottages in the district are very old, and consequently a large proportion of the closets in these cottages are not fitted with flushing cisterns. Inspection is however frequently carried out, and any insanitary condition likely to cause illness or a nuisance is brought to the notice of the owner or occupier.

Scavenging.

The arrangements for the removal and disposal of house refuse are made by the Council under contract, and the cleansing of Terrace cesspools is now carried out officially by the Council.

6—Sanitary Inspection of the Area

(a) During the year 1925 the Sanitary Inspector paid 122 visits to the Slaughterhouses, Bakehouses, Dairies, etc. A total of five defects were found and remedied.

(b) As to nuisances, 14 complaints were received in the district, 2 of these being in regard to pigstyes. There were 30 informal notices issued for abatement of nuisances, and 96 nuisances abated in all.

Schools. The Sanitary conditions and water supply of the Schools in the District have been inspected from time to time and found to be in good order.

7—Housing

General Housing Conditions in the Area.

1. Housing conditions are in some parts of the Area unsatisfactory. Many cottages are old, badly in need of repair, and lack accommodation for the large families living in them, making epidemics of infectious and contagious diseases more difficult to control. Cottages which have been condemned in the past have not been vacated owing to the lack of new dwellings with suitable rents.

2. (a) It is estimated that about 150 new cottages are needed for the requirements of the working classes in the district.

(b) Every encouragement is given by the Council in the erection of new houses, and advantage has been taken of the subsidy by builders in the district.

Housing Statistics for the year 1925.

(a)	Number of new houses erected during the year	...	12
(b)	With State assistance under the Housing Acts :		
	(i) By the Local Authority	... ..	Nil
	(ii) By other bodies or persons	... ..	8

1. Unfit dwelling-houses.

Inspection—

(1)	Total number of dwelling-houses inspected for housing defects (under Public Health or Housing Acts)	... ..	} 356
(2)	Number of dwelling-houses which were inspected and recorded under the Housing (Inspection of District) Regulations, 1910, or the Housing Consolidated Regulations, 1925	... ..
(3)	Number of dwelling-houses found to be in a state so dangerous or injurious to health as to be unfit for human habitation.	... ..	15
(4)	Number of dwelling-houses (exclusive of those referred to under the preceding sub-head) found not to be in all respects reasonably fit for human habitation	... ..	Nil

2. Remedy of defects without Service of formal Notices.

	Number of defective dwelling-houses rendered fit in consequence of informal action by the Local Authority or their Officers	16
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3. Action under Statutory Powers.

A.—Proceedings under section 3 of the Housing Act, 1925.

(1)	Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which notices were served requiring repairs	... ..	} Nil
(2)	Number of dwelling-houses which were rendered fit after service of formal notices :—		
	(a) By owners	... ..
	(b) By Local Authority in default of owners...	... ..
(3)	Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which Closing Orders became operative in pursuance of declarations by owners of intention to close	... ..	Nil

B.—Proceedings under Public Health Acts.

(1)	Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which notices were served requiring defects to be remedied	... ..	12
(2)	Number of dwelling-houses in which defects were remedied after service of formal notices :—		
	(a) By owners	... ..	Nil
	(b) By Local Authority in default of owners...	... ..	Nil

C.—Proceedings under sections 11, 14 and 15 of the Housing Act, 1925.

(1) Number of representations made with a view to the making of Closing Orders	Nil
(2) Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which Closing Orders were made	Nil
(3) Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which Closing Orders were determined, the dwelling-houses having been rendered fit	Nil
(4) Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which Demolition Orders were made	Nil
(5) Number of dwelling-houses demolished in pursuance of Demolition Orders	Nil

8—Inspection and Supervision of Food

(a) *Milk Supply*

There are 28 Dairies, Milkshops and Cowsheds in the District. Twenty-six visits have been paid to these during 1925, and four were found defective, these have since been remedied.

(b) *Meat*

The Public Health (Meat) Regulations (1924) have been carried out. There are 4 private but no public Slaughterhouses. The Sanitary Inspector has paid 72 visits to Slaughterhouses during the year—one carcase only was found unfit for human consumption.

Bakehouses.

There are 5 Bakehouses in the District. Twenty-four visits of inspection were paid to these in 1925.

9—Prevalence of and control over Infectious Diseases

Infectious Diseases generally.

During the past 5 years the chief infectious disease causing trouble has been *Diphtheria*. The primary case each year has evidently been a school-child carrier, not necessarily attending any particular school. In all 31 cases have been notified during the 5 years, but only four deaths from this disease have been reported. Antitoxin has been promptly used by the Medical Practitioner attending the case, and is supplied free by the Council in necessitous cases. Twelve cases of *Scarlet Fever* were notified during the 5 years, there were no deaths from this disease. Epidemics of *Measles* occurred in the Autumns of 1921 and 1923, and an epidemic of Whooping-Cough in November and December, 1925.

Arrangements for the examination of pathological and bacteriological specimens are not carried out by the Council except for the Water Supply, but the disinfection of infected premises is performed officially by the Sanitary Inspector.

Mortality from Influenza

During the past 5 years 23 deaths have been reported as due to Influenza, but in nearly all these cases some complication such as Pneumonia has been the fatal factor.

10—Notifiable diseases other than Tuberculosis during the year 1925.

	Total cases notified	Total deaths
Scarlet Fever ...	4	Nil
Diphtheria ...	11	
Erysipelas ...	1	

11—Tuberculosis

New cases and Mortality during 1925.

Age Periods	New Cases			Deaths		
	Pulmonary		Non-Pulmonary	Pulmonary		Non-Pul.
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
5 to 10 years		1	Nil			Nil
10 to 15 "	1				2	
20 to 25 "	2			1		
25 to 35 "	1			3		
45 to 50 "	1					
Totals ...	5	1		4	2	

All deaths from this disease had been previously notified.

It has not been necessary to take any action under Article 3 or serve any notices under Article 5 in connection with employees in the Milk trade suffering from Tuberculosis.

12—Maternity and Child Welfare

The Infant Welfare Centre at Appledore, which was re-opened in 1924, is still doing good work, and has proved a valuable help to the mothers and children. No cases of puerperal fever or ophthalmia neonatorum have been notified.

About 700 mothers and 760 children (510 infants and 250 children aged 1 to 5 years) attended the centre during 1925.